Chapter 7

Original Text

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Translation

Heaven is long; Earth is enduring.

The reason Heaven and Earth can be long and enduring is that they do not live for themselves; therefore they can long endure.

Thus the Sage puts himself after, and he ends up in front; he puts himself outside, and his person is preserved.

Is it not because he is without private claims?
Therefore he is able to accomplish his own.

Word Notes

- □□□ **— “do not live for themselves”**: not existing for self, not taking the self as the axis.
- □□□ **— “puts himself after”**: yields, lets others come first.
- □□ **— “ends up in front”**: paradoxical result of yielding.
- □□□ **— “puts himself outside”**: does not center on self-interest or self-preservation.
- □□ **— “person is preserved”**: thereby remains secure.
- □□ **— “without private claims”**: not acting for self alone.

- □□□ **— “accomplish his own”**: in fact perfects his true personal good by not grasping at it.

Chapter Explanation

Heaven lasts and Earth endures. The reason Heaven and Earth can be both long and enduring is that they give life to beings but do not give life to themselves; therefore they can long endure.

Accordingly, the Sage in all things lets others go first—he **puts himself after**, yet his person in fact comes to the fore. He does not scramble for power and profit—he **puts himself outside**, yet his person in fact is preserved. Is it not because he does not act for himself? Precisely because he does not act for himself, he is able to **accomplish** his own true good.

Discourse

This chapter says that Heaven and Earth are born from the **valley-spirit**; while the valley-spirit’s not-dying is not visible to the eye, the long endurance of Heaven and Earth is known to all. If Heaven and Earth endure, we can infer the valley-spirit. And the reason Heaven and Earth endure is that they **give life to the myriad beings without giving life to themselves**. On the face of it, to give life without giving life to oneself ought to mean immediate extinction. But the principle of the space between Heaven and Earth is **cyclical**. Heaven and Earth give birth to beings; once beings are generated, their **primordial qi** returns to Heaven and Earth. Moreover, beings cannot go beyond Heaven and Earth. Thus **when Heaven and Earth give life to beings, they are in fact giving life to themselves**.

If Heaven and Earth did not take the myriad beings as **one body**, but acted **for themselves alone**, they would become a mere, narrow “thing”—unworthy of being called “Heaven and Earth.” The Sage stands side by side with Heaven and Earth in this: **the world is one household; the nations, one person**. By **putting himself after** and **putting himself outside**, he moves with the cycle of Heaven and Earth: what is placed behind rotates to the front and naturally ends up ahead; what is set outside becomes **great without an outside** and endures through the ages.

Otherwise, those who think only of themselves—**grasping for precedence** and **clinging to self-preservation**—provoke in others the desire to destroy them. How, then, could they possibly be first, or preserved?

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